

Wrote
9 Feb

ST. ASPENQUID

OF

MT. AGAMENTICUS.

Wrote
9 July.

AN INDIAN IDYL.

BY

JOHN ALBEE.

PORTSMOUTH:

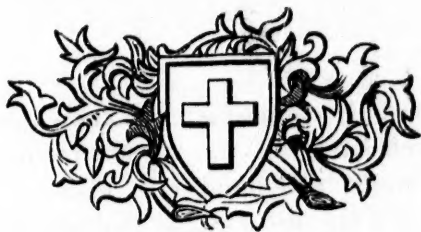
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1879.

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POOR is the land that hath no legend lore,
No myths, no muse nor music of its own,
Descending through innumerable years,
Wherein is stored the life of all the past ;
As on some ancient shrine the pilgrims' gifts.
In rich array each other overhang ;
And some do sparkle forth a recent fame,
Some in dust and venerated age are masked.
What has the savage left in this new world
For him who seeks a self-sustaining plinth
Whereon to rear his modern masonry?
He had few fashions that subserve our art ;
And all have failed that, tempted, strung his shells.
And thought it coinage of Apollo's mint.
In his rude birchen cabin or canoe,
In one no hook for graceful ornament,
Nor could the other breast the seas we sail.
All eye, all ear, the nature which he faced
He named with names that still the poet loves,
Though overscrawled with wild ambition's blare.
Proud, unabashed, he looked on nature's forms.

And paid the only compliment he knew ;
 Then soon retreating left the vague surmise
 If he knew aught of symbol or of sign,
 With which we tag our modern elegies,
 Beholding but ourselves in all we see,
 Vaunting the very flowers do give us thoughts
 And stars are but the ensigns of our souls.
 The savage brought to all an eye, an ear,
 And left behind his mimic, fancied name,
 But not the deep imagined, reflex song,
 The earth revested by the plastic mind.
 But when he felt the prick of novel pain,
 Which the Caucasian hand first always gives,
 When in new lands its banner is uplift,
 A pathos thrilled from heart to unused brain ;
 And as the youthful poet's trial-song,
 When every new-born passion brings a pang,
 Most often is a plaint, so his was sad
 And eloquent.

In that same monotone,
 An echoed, Ossianic melancholy,
 We feign for him his speech ; so we agree
 The Indian archetype shall front the page.

I follow on the worn and customary way.
 When deep the snow and few the passing tracks,
 We try to follow those have gone before ;
 Some strides too long for us and some too short,

We flounder off to make a new, but soon
Return and gladly to the beaten way.

It pleased me in this ancient, lonesome isle,
One wintry day, when all the fields were white,
Watching, toward night, thro' frosting window-panes,
The driven clouds pass Agamenticus,
And o'er the sea dissolve and lose themselves,
To see arise upon the MOUNTAIN's top
Saint Aspenquid ; no clearer sailors saw,
Far off, Athene crown th' Acropolis,
Not all distinct, yet still they knew 'twas she.
Long the Saint had softly mingl'd in my thoughts,
The dim, fast fading shadow of a name ;
And now I sat to draw his lineaments,
Ere passed to nothingness and unbelief.
And while I bent to draw his antique form,
It chanced there came a sudden light, a voice,
And for a moment flashed the hero's soul ;
I, listening intent, wrought no more that day :
Taught by the vision that we needs must know
The inner ere we mould the outward form.

NEW CASTLE,
October, 1879.

ST. ASPENQUID.

THE Indian hero, sorcerer and saint,
Known in the land as Passaconoway,
And after called the good Saint Aspenquid,
Returning, travel worn and spent with age
From vain attempt to reconcile his race
With ours, sent messengers throughout the East
To summon all the blood-bound tribes to him ;
For that upon the ancient meeting-place,
The sacred mountain Agamenticus,
When next the moon should show a new bent bow,
He there would celebrate his funeral feast
With sacrifices due and farewell talk.
The dusky people heard and they obeyed ;
For known was Aspenquid in all the camps ;
Known was his name where unknown was his face :
His conjuries, his valor and his wit
The trackless forests traversed many a year,
And made his name a word of omen there.
Then gathered they from all the hither land
Of wide St. Lawrence and the northern lakes,
The warriors of the great Algonkin race ;

Whose friendship French and English wrangled for :
 Whose souls the Jesuit and Puritan
 Disputed long what pinfold heaven should keep :
 For whom the pious Râle laid down his life :
 For whom the Bible turned in Indianese
 Its ancient threat or new beatitude :
 Turned by Apostle Elliot's patient hand
 In words six-finger'd, unarticulate,
 Together strung like beads upon a string,
 And every page a picture, not a script.

And now the moon began to show her light
 A quarter up the amber, western sky,
 Close companied by one small star that shone
 Like point of diamond-headed arrow, drawn
 Between the corners of her silver bow.
 The mountain Agamenticus loomed on
 The twilight heavens in silent majesty,
 A natural throne and sepulchre for him
 Who ruled a natural sovereign there.
 No arts of man it showed, no monuments
 Nor fane, nor the long roll of famous deeds,
 But all was rude magnificence and strength !
 Far to the North the ancient forests stretched.
 Whose thick-set tops the winds might blow upon
 But could not shake their immemorial roots.
 Eastward the ocean washed the mountain's feet.
 And like the land, as yet a virgin waste.

It beat against the white embattl'd cliffs,
 Or swept a plumèd wave across the sands,
 Unsailed for traffick and untouched by thought.
 So fresh was nature then ; for the wild tribes,
 Though dwelling here beyond the date of time,
 Let undisturbed the elements they found
 Crossed and recrossed the land and left no mark.
 But void as is the sky when stars have passed,
 So empty was this world of man's bright course.
 Of nature's self they were too near a part
 To think how they could warp her to their hest :
 And kindly she supplied their simple wants
 Ungraced by arts perplexing, manifold,
 That make us dead to what we touch or see
 So many steps they are from their first form,
 So dwarfed is man by his own handiwork.
 Not so the Indian's life ; meagre it was,
 Unlit by customs of the citied world ;
 Ruled by unwritten laws, though fixed and kept.
 But he himself was more than all, and free
 From malady for things beyond his reach.
 So the tall warriors looked ; round their camp fires
 Sitting or standing, now in light or shade,
 As with the night winds rose or sank the flames.
 And all about the mountain's woody slopes
 A veil of moonlit, opal mist crept up,
 Festooned across the pine tree pinnacles,
 And islanding the band above the earth,

With only night and stars for witnesses.
 They spoke but little, but the silence spoke ;
 Men of few words and every word a thing :
 Impassive, taciturn, yet seeing all.
 And every sense infallible by use
 Of life lived in the sunshine or the dark.
 And conversant alone with nature's works.
 To hunt the fox their step was taught to be
 E'en lighter footed than the fox himself ;
 The hawk's sharp eye was not so sharp as theirs :
 More wary they than is the partridge bird
 When first she leads her little brood abroad.
 They spoke brief words of what the morrow morn
 Would see, the feast, the dance, the farewell talk
 Of Aspenquid, and laid them down to rest.

But Aspenquid in thought all night awake
 Was meditating how to frame right words,
 That should forever fix themselves within
 The breasts of all the chieftains hearing him
 And be to them a never silent voice :
 A secret totem binding them to him
 When the impending day of gloom should come.
 Sore troubled was his heart to find few words,
 As his laconic kinsman liked to hear.
 But piercing, lofty, going to the mark
 Like shrilling arrows drawn to the very head.
 And now in softer mood the past came up.

Filled with the images of other days,
 Then faded as an old man's past will fade.
 But when the life is lived, the present naught.
 The spirit leaps to that which is to be,
 And through a loophole in a shadowed room
 Looks out on light, itself in darkness hid.
 So came the future unto Aspenquid,
 And sharp and dolorous the vision was.
 But crowding thoughts must pass and spend themselves :
 And as night waned and morning's heralds came.
 The shadows fled his soul, and he was calm.
 He heard the voice that was to be his own
 Peal down its accents in the waking sky ;
 And one by one he saw the stars fade out ;
 But they would rise again, but he no more !

The feast was ended ; bird and beast were slain,
 (Three thousand, so the ancient annals say.)
 The dance was danced and every rite performed :
 And gathered round the summit of the mount
 The stately, silent sachems stood intent
 On Aspenquid ; he over all was tall
 And straight as ash though ripe with ninety years.
 He rose majestic on the sovereign top
 Of his own land, and in that solemn hour
 He seemed to tower above his wonted height.
 As towers in midmost air the stricken bird.
 His locks were thin but raven black and long ;

Nor yet his eyes had lost their splendid dark,
 But glowed deep set beneath a low, broad brow.
 Unpinched by age his face was firm, and bronzed
 Like leaves that hang all winter on the oak.
 No more he wore the bird's gay colored plumes,
 The wampum belt of beads and sinuous shells,
 But soberer garb as well beseeemed his years.
 Nor had he on the weapons that of yore
 Delighted his victorious, haughty youth,
 The pride of all his friends and dread of foes.
 A staff he held on which he sometimes leaned,
 To fix on them the image of his age—
 Which else his bearing would have made forgot—
 And give his words a weightier memory.
 Then to the waiting band he thus began :

Warriors and braves come nearer to your chief!
 My eyes that once could brook the mid-day sun,
 And see the eagle ere myself was seen,
 Are dimmed with age ; and but a pace beyond
 A misty light seems settled over all.
 Come nearer braves, that I may feast my eyes
 On your young limbs, on what myself once was !
 Alas ! but I remember what I was.
 But now with years and toils am I outworn,
 And that Great Spirit whom we call our own
 No longer smiles as once upon my life,
 But summons me away from it and you,

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s,
Seals up the past and stays the onward path.
To this our old ancestral council seat,
The mountain Agamenticus, renowned
Of old for feasts, for truce or onset sharp,
I call you once again to hear my words.
You know how well and oft in former days,
My ready deeds outdid reluctant speech ;
But now an old man leans against the staff
Which once he bravely brandished on his foe,
And lets his tongue outrun his shrunken arm.
Yet I so near the end of all my years
See lights which my too active life obscured.
With eye intent upon the ground, I kept
The trail through forests deep, by day, by night,
For years, one narrow line and one alone.
But, lo ! I near its end, and see beyond,
A wider world and things not so distinct,
Though worth you turn your eyes with me that way.
And would that I could tell you all the past,
Of all that happened in your fathers' days,
Not yours, that so you might be wise and great
Without the cost of being first unwise.
But never man could take his fathers' store
Of wisdom, building higher for the gift.
He digs his field anew and plants and reaps
The selfsame harvest which it ever bore.
Much I could tell, the path that I have come,
All I have seen that you have only heard :

All that I fear for you who follow on,
 Or hope for who shall fill some future age.
 Whatever makes me wise I would impart
 And leave, a legacy to all my race.
 Howbeit men, grown old and seeming sage,
 Must tell their tale and mingle words of ware.
 To ease their hearts, and to live o'er again
 The days when action left no room for words.
 So I will tell you of my former life,
 Wherein, if wise, you read my last advice.
 And do not mourn because it is the last.
 And being last must show some sign of grief.
 The heart must then its deeper wounds unbare
 When sets the sun that brought its hopes and fears;
 And in the twilight of the soul it seems
 To see a phantom image of itself,
 And speaks as to a long departed friend.
 But were he here, that ancient, happy chief,
 Whose counsel all his children held the best,
 Obeyed, whatever private mind they kept,
 Then silent reverence would fill my soul.
 O what am I that I should speak to you!
 I, who being next of kin, nearest heard
 That voice, and never learned to hear my own,
 And had no need to learn. But he is gone
 Whose tongue was fiery now as noontide suns,
 Or soft as moonlight on the waveless sea.
 It threw its warmth and light o'er you and all:

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But me, who needed most, the most of all,
 As light shows lightest on the darkest place.
 Alas! you cannot hear his voice in me;
 I hear it only when my own is still.
 Something I speak for your behoof and guide,
 Something for my own self; to ease my life,
 And to lay off its pains before I go.
 Much rather would I die in some fierce fight,
 And join, without a thought or grief, mine own,
 Than to wear out the years with wasting pulse,
 Ebbing away so slowly drop by drop,
 I know not whether I be dead or live.
 And I have lived too long for my best weal;
 For more and more the white men crowd the land;
 And though I battled them with all my braves,
 And stirred my neighbor sachems to the war,
 And fought them step by step, in hopes to stay
 Their coming, or if not, to die in fight,
 Before they gained these streams and well stocked woods,
 And I should hang my head in vanquished shame—
 In vain! 't was all in vain! the shame has come
 And life has been too long for my best weal.
 And though, when my rude craft of tomahawk
 And scalp, long bow and flinty arrow head,
 All wiles that fox and hawk had taught to me,
 Availed me not, and more and more the land
 Was filled with these pale children of the sun,
 While woods grew thin along the river banks,

While deer and caribou still backward skulked—
 Why read we not, alas! our fate in theirs?—
 And all the chrystal streams were fouled and shrunk,
 Or trained to put their shoulder to a wheel,
 Hoarding our sweet waters into stagnant pools,
 And mills and high-peaked ships plagued all their course.
 Frighting the bass and flouncing salmon off
 Beyond the reach of light canoe and spear—
 Why read we not, alas! our fate in theirs?—
 When these my fathers' arms bestead me not,
 To keep mine own and hurl th' invader back,
 I laid them off: and hiding me away
 From all my tribe upon the mountain's side,
 When the May moon was in her darkest cave,
 I gathered all the charms once taught to me
 By our Abnakian wizards in my youth;
 All herbs and twigs of mightiest power,
 The speckled alder and the black ash leaves,
 The moose-wood's sprout, straight, lithe and livid green;
 Flowers which grow in deepest forest trails,
 With deadly looking bloom and poison leaves.
 Streaked like the insidious adder's back;
 The enchanter's nightshade with hookèd hairs,
 The cornel red and baleful orchis plant;
 These in an osier basket then I placed,
 And over them the cod's two fatal bones,
 The precious stone that saves the moose's heart,
 The snake's shed skin, the eye of dismal owl,

The brown wolf's tooth and scalp of white man's child.
Thus day by day, at earliest break of morn,
I left my hiding-place and climbed high up
The top of Agamenticus; the sea
And land lay all before me; I could mark
The straight, blue lines of smoke unbroken climb
Above the camping grounds of my brave kin,
And far beyond, but still too near! the homes
And sails of all the hated robber race.
Then spreading out my magic heap of charms
Upon the mountain's highest, tabled ledge,
I wove my arms toward heaven over them,
If so be I might touch the Spirit's hand
And join His curse to mine against my foe.
Long with sorceries and all passions fierce
I strove to bind His will and hate with mine;
Then I laid the enchantments one by one
Together in an ordered pile, and blew
A spark to flame, and nursing slow the fire
That nothing might escape—for every spark
So lost would lose me some white, faithless face—
I cast the ashes toward my enemies;
And after them an arrow I let fly,
Hate-feathered and tipped with my own arm's blood.
But all in vain! for on and on they come,
The red man wanes and wanes and loses all
And I have lived too long to see this shame.

Once more did I essay to save my race.
 I put off quiver, corslet and bright plume,
 Hung up my belt and cloak of beaver skins,
 And clothed me like the trading Englishman;
 Yea more—for over all the priestly gown
 I threw; and with no comrade save my dog,
 (That one whom I "Exhorter" named because
 He seized the heels of those who spurned my words,)
 And all my goods a blanket and a staff,
 I left my warriors chieftainless and sad,
 To strange lands set my face and other ways.
 I wandered westward, preaching that new word
 Which I had heard when first the white man came,
 And asked of us, not hunting-grounds, but souls!
 Something he said of peace, good-will to men;
 Whether he meant this word not for himself
 But only us, thereby to thrust a wedge
 Between our rights and his too treacherous greed.
 I know not; but this thing to put to proof
 I preached the white men's doctrines to themselves
 As they to us; did they not mean it so?
 And what was good for us as well for them?
 For once asked I Elliot of his faith,
 Revolving if some mischief new were hid
 To work more ill on me and on my race.
 But when I heard the precepts, peaceful, pure,
 First preach'd to them who for the first time hear,
 While faith still leads, not flatters men's desires,

A thought stole in my heart and harbor'd there
 How this might be a spell to lay the strife
 That my presaging soul felt yet to come.
 Yet I, not used to thinking but to act,
 Put doubt and argument always aside ;
 And I spoke words of peace, and chiefly these :
 That they should love their neighbor as themselves ;
 And all the more if he were poor and mean,
 A savage, as they said, with no true God ;
 Nor covet lands their king nor fathers owned ;
 But we would give them of our own enough,
 And they should live with us in trust and love,
 Teaching to us the arts of peace they praised.
 And to the warriors of my haughty race
 I said, give up a portion of each thing,
 That we may be at rest and cease to fear ;
 Give to the stranger equal parts of field,
 Of lake, of wood, and trust and learn of him
 How in all ways to be his peer and friend ;
 Thus only shall we save ourselves and live,
 Grow strong together and possess the land.

So traversed I the homes of new come hordes,
 And sixty tribes, alien, yet like to mine,
 Guided by western stars, until the sea
 Grew distant and a mighty mountain wall
 Rose up between me and some other world.
 Hindered by this, back turned I on my trail,

Oft losing, in those lands, untracked, unknown ;
 And then I came where I had been before,
 Where I had spoke the words my heart found out.
 And as I came more near my ancient seat,
 Lo ! in all mouths I found myself a saint,
 The good Saint Aspenquid they called ; for me
 Long passed beyond report of scout or fame
 They counted dead ; but my remembered words
 Were yet alive, and people called me saint ;
 Half scorn, half love ! for they remembered not
 To do the thing I taught, but only words !
 And evermore the deadly feud grows wide,
 My race decays and I have lived too long.
 My limbs with ninety weary winters' strife
 Are spent, my fathers call me unto them ;
 I go to comfort their impatient shades
 And respite find for all my own mischance.
 And here once more on Agamenticus,
 My old ancestral powwow's sacred seat,
 That saw the waters burn and trees to dance,
 And winter's withered leaves grow green again,
 And in dead serpents' skin the living coil,
 While they themselves would change themselves to flame,
 And where not less did I myself conjure
 The mighty magic of my fathers' rites
 Against my foe, yet all without effect—
 The spirits also flee where white men come—
 I turn to join my kindred sagamores

And fly before the doom I could not change.
 Albeit all ways known to me I sought
 To hinder English settlements and spoil ;
 The ambuscade, the open fight, old wiles,
 The cunning that from nature we have learnt,
 Half brother as we are to fox and crow.
 Then arts of sorcery, wherein before
 The shores were ravaged so by gold-mad men,
 I had great skill and gained me fame at home,
 And far to east and west my name was known.
 Last hope of all, the white man's boasted arms.
 Love, honor, faith I turned against himself ;
 But all in vain, and I have lived too long.
 Now take my farewell word and heed it well ;

Children of day, are these the pale-faced men ;
 Children of night, are we the red man's tribes.
 The heavens are bright on them and they will grow
 Like fields of maize in the long summer days.
 Yet you will fade before their orbiting race,
 As when the hunters' roundest, riding moon
 Bathes wood and field in lustrous, frosty light,
 Then leaves their greenness all a blackened wreck.
 They have a spirit father strange to us,
 Who, prophets say, this land to them decreed,
 And you will fail ; yet grieve not, counsel hear ;
 Light not the fires of vengeance in your hearts
 For sure the flame will turn against yourselves,

And you will perish utterly from earth.
 Nor yet submit too meekly, but maintain
 The valorous name once ours in happy days.
 Be prudent, wise and always slow to strike;
 Fall back, seek other shores and hunting grounds—
 I cannot bear you perish utterly!
 Though looking through the melancholy years
 I see the end, but turn my face away,
 So heavy are my eyes with unshed tears;
 And yours too I would turn, warriors and braves!
 And mind not my prophetic vision much—
 Th' unhappy gift of him who lives too long—
 But mind the counsel many years have taught,
 The last I give—remember it and live!

John Albee

address after 10 March 1880

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